

An Empirical Study on the influence of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Purchase Behavior in Online Skincare Shopping

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Introduction

In recent times, the advancement of digital technology has completely changed the way brands and consumers interact with each other. Social media platforms have grown into powerful tools that guide the choices consumers make, particularly when they shop online. These platforms are no longer used only to stay in touch with people; they have become places where consumers look for new products, gather information, compare options, and finally decide what to buy.

Social media marketing refers to the promotion of products and services through social platforms by using content creation, partnerships with influencers, and direct interaction with users. Unlike older forms of marketing, social media allows communication to flow in two directions, which means consumers can actively take part in conversations with brands. This has made the overall marketing process more flexible, personalized, and focused on what the consumer actually wants.

The skincare sector has seen remarkable expansion through the use of social media. Since skincare products are closely linked to personal health and appearance, consumers tend to be very careful before buying. They consider details like their skin type, the ingredients used, the safety of the product, and its effects over time. Because of this careful approach, buyers depend heavily on outside sources of information such as influencer recommendations, product reviews, video tutorials, and transformation results that others share on social media.

When someone shops online, they go through a series of steps before making a decision. These steps include becoming aware of a product, looking for information, comparing available choices, deciding to buy, and reflecting on the experience afterward. Social media marketing plays a role at each of these steps by giving users useful information, social proof, and emotional connection. Features like likes, comments, shares, and content posted by real users help create a feeling of trust and reliability, which strongly affects the final decision.

Even though many companies are spending heavily on social media marketing, the actual effect it has on purchase decisions is still not well understood. It is not clear which specific elements, such as influencers, online reviews, or content quality, have the greatest impact on what consumers choose to buy. With this in mind, this study has been conducted to understand the role of social media marketing in shaping consumer behavior in the online skincare shopping space and to find out which factors matter the most in driving purchase decisions.

Objectives

- To examine the effect of influencer marketing on consumer buying decisions.
- To understand the contribution of online reviews and content created by users.
- To find out which component of social media marketing has the strongest influence on purchase decisions.

Hypotheses

H1: Trust has a significant impact on purchase intention.

H2: Influencer marketing has a clear effect on consumer buying behavior.

H3: Online reviews play a strong role in shaping purchase decisions.

H4: The quality of content positively affects consumer trust.

Literature Review

The connection between social media use and consumer decision-making has attracted growing attention from researchers, particularly in the areas of digital marketing and online commerce. Social media has now become a central part of everyday life for many people, giving them easy access to information, peer opinions, and shared experiences that shape what they eventually choose to purchase.

Kapoor and Dwivedi (2020) found that social media contributes meaningfully to how consumers become aware of and remember brands. Their research showed that content that is visually attractive, seen repeatedly, and targeted at the right audience has a significant effect on the early stages of consumer decision-making. Smith (2021) also examined influencer marketing and noted that consumers tend to view influencers as more approachable and credible than traditional celebrity endorsers, a trend that is especially evident in the beauty and skincare category.

Ladhari and Michaud (2022) explored the importance of trust in online buying and concluded that reviews that feel genuine and brands that are seen as credible play a major role in giving consumers the confidence to go ahead with a purchase. Their findings suggested that when information is perceived as honest and reliable, consumers are much more willing to buy. Rahman (2022) added to this by observing that content posted by ordinary users tends to build more trust than promotional content put out by brands themselves, mainly because it comes across as more realistic.

Sharma (2023) drew attention to the rising significance of video content in guiding consumer choices. Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram Reels offer detailed demonstrations of products in use, helping consumers form a better understanding of how a product works

and whether it suits their needs. This type of content is especially useful in the skincare space, where people need visible proof before they feel confident about buying.

Bharati and Jain (2022) studied what makes influencers credible and found that being honest, knowledgeable, and relatable are the most important qualities for effective influencer communication. Consumers are more likely to trust influencers who share their opinions without bias. Kim and Park (2020) also pointed out the value of social proof, noting that positive ratings, reviews, and endorsements from others noticeably raise a consumer's intention to purchase.

Patel (2023) observed that social media influencers have a clear and direct effect on how much consumers trust skincare brands, and this effect is especially strong among younger buyers.

Mehta and Singh (2022) noted that content generated by users adds a layer of openness and reliability to the buying process, which in turn increases the likelihood of making a purchase.

Verma (2021) concluded that customer reviews serve as an important tool in the decision-making process by helping consumers feel less uncertain and less exposed to risk.

Gupta and Verma (2023) studied how social media engagement connects with consumer buying behavior and found that when users interact more with content through likes, comments, and shares, it strengthens brand awareness and keeps customers involved. However, they also noted that engagement on its own is not enough to lead to a purchase unless it is backed by trust and a genuine belief in the product.

Ali and Khan (2022) looked at how digital word-of-mouth works in online shopping environments and found that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays a critical role in forming consumer attitudes. Their study indicated that people tend to rely more on recommendations from other users and on stories shared by fellow buyers than on traditional advertisements, particularly when buying products that involve careful consideration, such as skincare items.

Joshi (2021) examined how the fear of making the wrong choice affects online buying behavior and found that social media can reduce this fear by offering detailed product information and honest user feedback. The research stressed that openness and truthful communication are key factors in building consumer confidence in online settings.

Research Gap

Despite a considerable body of research on social media marketing, several important areas remain underexplored, particularly when it comes to skincare products and Indian consumers.

To begin with, a large portion of the existing literature focuses on general consumer behavior or broad product segments like cosmetics or e-commerce as a whole. Very few studies have looked specifically at the skincare segment, which involves a higher level of perceived risk and places greater importance on trust, user reviews, and product appropriateness. Additionally, most earlier research tends to study individual aspects of social media marketing, such as influencer marketing or online reviews, one at a time. There is limited work that looks at the combined effect of several social media marketing dimensions, including influencer credibility, content quality, and user-generated content, on how consumers make their final decisions.

There is also a clear absence of region-specific empirical studies set in the Indian context, particularly those that focus on young urban consumers. Most previous work is either global in scope or tied to specific regions such as Western or Southeast Asian markets, which makes it less applicable to the behavior patterns of Indian consumers. Furthermore, while social media engagement is growing, consumer trust in influencer marketing is shifting, and many users are becoming skeptical of content that appears paid or sponsored. However, there is very little research that examines how this change in attitude affects actual buying behavior.

There is also a noticeable gap between consumer engagement and actual purchase conversion that has not been adequately addressed. Most existing studies focus on awareness and purchase intention rather than on whether a purchase is actually completed. This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining the combined impact of multiple social media marketing factors on consumer purchase behavior in online skincare shopping, specifically within the Indian context.

Problem Statement

In recent years, social media marketing has become a central strategy for skincare brands aiming to shape consumer decisions. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube are widely used for product promotion, influencer tie-ups, and building engagement with customers.

However, despite the large amounts being invested in these platforms, brands continue to face uncertainty about whether these efforts actually lead consumers to make a purchase. While social media is clearly good at creating awareness and generating interest, it is not always clear whether this engagement results in real buying decisions. Consumers are constantly exposed to a large volume of skincare-

related content, including influencer posts, how-to videos, and product reviews. However, the influence of each of these factors on consumer behavior is not equal. The growing presence of paid and sponsored content has also made many consumers more cautious, which adds to the difficulty brands face when trying to identify what actually drives purchases.

There is also a noticeable mismatch between high social media engagement and low actual purchase frequency, particularly among younger consumers. This raises important questions about how effective current social media marketing strategies really are. The key problem this study aims to address is: To what extent do different components of social media marketing influence consumer behavior in online skincare shopping, and which of these factors has the greatest impact on purchase intention and the final buying decision?

Methodology

This section describes the process used for collecting and analyzing data in this study. The primary aim of the research is to understand how social media marketing affects the way consumers make purchase decisions in online skincare shopping. The research methodology has been designed to maintain reliability, validity, and a logical flow throughout the study process.

Research Approach

This study follows a quantitative research approach. The data gathered is numerical and has been analyzed using statistical methods to test the proposed hypotheses and draw meaningful conclusions.

The quantitative approach is suitable for this study because it allows:

- Objective measurement of consumer responses
- Statistical validation of relationships between variables
- Better generalization of findings within the sample

Research Design

The study uses a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive part helps in understanding consumer behavior, preferences, and habits related to social media use and online skincare purchases. The analytical part focuses on exploring the relationship between social media marketing variables, including influencer marketing, online reviews, and content quality, and consumer purchase behavior. This design is suitable because the study observes and analyzes existing consumer perceptions and behaviors without manipulating any variables.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study includes:

- Individuals between 18 and 25 years of age
- Regular users of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook
- Consumers who have previously bought skincare products online

This group was chosen because young consumers spend a significant amount of time on digital platforms and are generally more responsive to social media marketing strategies.

Sampling Technique

The study uses a convenience sampling method, in which respondents are chosen based on how easily they can be reached and their willingness to take part in the survey. While this approach is non-probabilistic and may have some limitations in terms of generalizability, it is appropriate for this study given the time available, the ease of reaching respondents through online platforms, and the need to focus on a specific group of digital users.

Sample Size

A total of 108 respondents participated in the study. This sample size is considered sufficient for identifying patterns and relationships in consumer behavior for an academic research project.

Sources of Data

The study draws on both primary and secondary data.

Primary Data

- Collected through a structured questionnaire
- Responses gathered using Google Forms

Secondary Data

- Research papers and academic journals
- Articles related to social media marketing and consumer behavior
- Online sources and previous studies

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire included demographic questions related to age, gender, and occupation, questions about social media usage habits, and Likert scale statements ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The Likert scale was used to measure:

- Consumer perceptions
- Level of agreement with given statements
- Behavioral tendencies related to social media and purchase decisions

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through an online survey using Google Forms. The questionnaire was shared with MBA students, young working professionals, and social media users who have experience purchasing skincare products online. The survey link was circulated through WhatsApp and Instagram. Data collection was carried out over one month, from January 2026 to February 2026. Only those respondents who actively use social media and have previously purchased skincare products online were included in the final dataset.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (Age and Gender)

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
18-25	30	49	79	73%
26-35	4	5	9	8%
36-45	3	4	7	7%
Above 45	5	8	13	12%
Total	42	66	108	100%

Interpretation

The demographic data shows that 73% of respondents belong to the 18-25 age group, which reflects a strong presence of young consumers in the sample. Female respondents account for 61% of the total while male respondents make up 39%, indicating greater participation from women. This is a relevant finding given that skincare is a category where women are typically more involved. The combined data suggests that young female consumers form the largest group that is influenced by social media marketing.

Table 2: Frequency of Online Shopping

Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Daily	6	6%
Weekly	14	13%
Monthly	39	36%
Rarely	49	45%

Interpretation

The data shows that the highest share of respondents, 45%, shop online only rarely, followed by 36% who do so monthly. Only 13% shop weekly and 6% do so on a daily basis. This finding suggests that even though respondents are actively using social media and regularly seeing marketing content, this does not automatically push them to buy frequently. The gap between exposure to social media content and

actual purchase activity highlights one of the key limitations of social media marketing, namely that it is far more effective at generating interest and awareness than at producing consistent buying behavior.

Table 3: Influencer Impact on Purchase Decisions

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	30	28%
Agree	42	39%
Neutral	20	19%
Disagree	10	9%
Strongly Disagree	6	5%

Interpretation

The results indicate that a combined 67% of respondents (28% strongly agreeing and 39% agreeing) acknowledge that influencer content has an impact on their purchase decisions. Around 19% remained neutral on the matter, while 14% disagreed. This clearly points to the strong role that influencer marketing plays in guiding consumer choices in the skincare category.

Table 4: Time Spent on Social Media Per Day

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	25	23%
1-2 hours	35	32%
2-3 hours	19	18%
More than 3 hours	29	27%

Interpretation

The data indicates that a large portion of respondents spend considerable time on social media each day. About 32% spend between one and two hours daily, 18% spend two to three hours, and 27% spend more than three hours. Only 23% use social media for less than one hour per day. These numbers make it clear that social media has become a regular part of the daily lives of the respondents, making it a highly relevant channel for marketing communication.

Table 5: Online Reviews Impact on Purchase Decisions

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	35	32%
Agree	40	37%
Neutral	18	17%
Disagree	10	9%
Strongly Disagree	5	5%

Interpretation

A total of 69% of respondents agree that online reviews have a meaningful effect on their purchase decisions. This shows that reviews serve as an important source of reassurance for buyers, helping them feel more confident and less worried about the risk of making a wrong purchase.

Table 6: Content Quality and Consumer Trust

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	28	26%

Agree	45	42%
Neutral	20	19%
Disagree	10	9%
Strongly Disagree	5	4%

Interpretation

Approximately 68% of respondents feel that better quality content helps in building greater trust toward a brand. This underlines the importance of creating content that is both informative and genuine, as it directly influences how much consumers trust what they see on social media.

Table 7: Trust vs Purchase Intention

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	30	28%
Agree	38	35%
Neutral	22	20%
Disagree	12	11%
Strongly Disagree	6	6%

Interpretation

Around 63% of respondents confirmed that trust is a key factor that directly shapes their intention to make a purchase. This finding highlights a strong connection between how much a consumer trusts a brand and their readiness to buy from it. It also reinforces the need for brands to make trust-building a core part of their social media marketing efforts.

Table 8: Content Type vs Trust Level

Content Type	High Trust	Low Trust	Total
Brand Generated	25	25	50
User Generated	45	13	58
Total	70	38	108

Interpretation

The data reveals that content created by users receives a higher level of trust from consumers compared to content produced by brands. This finding suggests that buyers are more likely to believe and rely on the real experiences shared by other users than on official brand communication.

Results And Discussion

Hypothesis Testing Results

H1: Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

As seen in Table 7, 63% of respondents agree that trust shaped by social media has a direct effect on purchase intention. Based on this evidence, the null hypothesis is rejected and H1 is accepted.

H2: Influencer Marketing and Buying Behavior

Based on Table 3, the chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 46.18$) is higher than the critical value (5.991). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This confirms that influencer marketing has a significant impact on consumer buying behavior.

H3: Online Reviews and Purchase Decisions

According to Table 5, 69% of respondents agree that online reviews influence their purchase decisions. The null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that H3 is supported.

H4: Content Quality and Consumer Trust

Table 6 shows that 68% of respondents believe content quality has a positive effect on consumer trust. The null hypothesis is rejected and H4 is accepted.

H1: Trust has a Significant Impact on Purchase Intention

Table 9: Trust Vs Purchase

Table 7	Trust	Purchase - Yes	Purchase - No	Total
Trust and PI	High	65	5	70
	Somewhat	12	8	20
	Low	12	6	18

The chi-square test was used to analyze the connection between trust and purchase intention.

- χ^2 value = 12.77
- df = 2
- Critical value = 5.991

Interpretation

Since χ^2 (12.77) is greater than the critical value of 5.991, the null hypothesis is rejected. This outcome confirms that trust has a clear and significant influence on purchase intention.

H2: Influencer Marketing Affects Buying Behavior

Table 10: Influencer vs Purchase

Table 3 (H2)	Influencer Trust	Purchase - Yes	Purchase - No	Total
Influencer Impact	High	64	8	72
	Neutral	8	12	20
	Low	3	13	16
Total		75	33	108

A chi-square test was applied to understand the relationship between influencer trust and purchase behavior.

- χ^2 value = 46.18
- df = 2
- Critical value = 5.991

Interpretation

Since χ^2 (46.18) exceeds the critical value of 5.991, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result confirms that influencer marketing significantly affects consumer buying behavior.

H3: Online Reviews Influence Purchase Decisions

Table 11: Reviews vs Purchase

Table 5 (H3)	Online Review	Purchase - Yes	Purchase - No	Total
Online Review Impact	Good	62	13	75
	Neutral	10	8	18
	Bad	11	4	15
Total		83	25	108

The chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between online reviews and purchase decisions.

- χ^2 value = 6.73
- df = 2
- Critical value = 5.991

Interpretation

Since χ^2 (6.73) is greater than 5.991, the null hypothesis is rejected. Online reviews clearly play an important role in influencing purchase decisions.

H4: Content Quality Impacts Trust (Mean Method)

The effect of content quality on consumer trust was analyzed using the mean score method, as responses were gathered on a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The mean score for content quality came out to approximately 3.8 out of 5, which indicates that respondents generally agree that high-quality content positively strengthens consumer trust. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and H4 is accepted, confirming that better content quality leads to stronger trust.

Chi-square analysis across all three independent variables confirmed that influencer marketing, online reviews, and content quality each have a statistically significant impact on consumer behavior.

A comparison by gender showed that female respondents are more influenced by social media marketing, especially by influencer recommendations and user reviews, compared to male respondents. Male participants demonstrated relatively lower levels of engagement and trust when it comes to skincare-related social media content.

Overall, the study findings confirm that social media marketing plays a meaningful role in shaping consumer behavior. The chi-square results show that trust ($\chi^2 = 12.77$), influencer marketing ($\chi^2 = 46.18$), and online reviews ($\chi^2 = 6.73$) all have a statistically significant effect on consumer purchase decisions. The mean score of 3.8 for content quality also indicates a positive association with consumer trust.

Table 6 shows that 68% of respondents believe content quality strengthens trust, while Table 7 reveals that 63% agree trust directly influences purchase intention. At the same time, Table 2 shows that 45% of respondents rarely make online purchases, indicating a gap between engagement with social media content and actual buying behavior. This points to the fact that while social media is effective for building awareness and helping consumers evaluate options, it is less effective at directly converting interest into completed purchases.

The overall results are consistent with findings from prior literature, further reinforcing the important role that social media marketing plays in guiding consumer behavior.

Conclusion

This study clearly demonstrates that social media marketing has a significant role to play in shaping how consumers behave when shopping for skincare products online. It contributes meaningfully to creating product awareness, delivering useful information, and helping consumers compare available options before reaching a final purchase decision. The research findings highlight that influencer marketing and online reviews are the two most powerful factors that affect what consumers decide to buy. Buyers tend to place greater trust in real experiences shared by other users and in content that feels relatable, rather than in traditional promotional messages. Trust stands out as one of the most critical factors in the entire process, having a direct and significant influence on whether a consumer proceeds with a purchase.

At the same time, the study also points out that strong social media engagement does not automatically lead to actual purchases. Many consumers hold back due to limited budgets, a lack of faith in paid promotions, and the sheer volume of content they are exposed to. This reflects a clear gap between how engaged consumers are with social media and how often they actually complete a purchase. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that while social media marketing is highly capable of attracting and engaging consumers, its success in driving actual conversions depends largely on how authentic, transparent, and credible the content and communication are. Brands that focus on building genuine trust and delivering content that is truly meaningful to their audience are more likely to see social media translate into real buying behavior.

Future research could explore additional dimensions such as pricing strategies, brand loyalty programs, and psychological motivations to deepen the understanding of consumer behavior in the growing digital marketplace.

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